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ASC-KDCN-VSO Kenya Volunteer Project Maximizing the value of the Kenyan diaspora

The Netherlands has had a special relationship with Kenya in the field of foreign trade and development cooperation since the 1950s (Kazimierczuk 2015). At a more private level, it is also recognized that the Kenyan diaspora are well equipped to transfer Dutch knowledge and entrepreneurship across the cultural divide back to counterparts in their country of origin (Kinuthia and Akinyoade 2012). With this background, the ASC (African Studies Centre Leiden), VSO (Voluntary Service Overseas) and KDCN (Kenyan Diaspora Community in the Netherlands) jointly submitted a proposal to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs titled “Maximizing the value of the Kenyan diaspora”.¹

The proposal was authored by Dr. Akinyinka Akinyoade and Dr. Harry Wels (ASC), Antony Otieno Ong’ayo and Jeff Nyamboga (KDCN), and Dorine de Jager (VSO), in conjunction with Joseph Junior Seh of Bridges Social Business Consultancy. VSO is one of the world’s leading independent international development organizations working through volunteers; KDCN is a non-profit umbrella association of and for Kenyans who are resident in the Netherlands, and the ASC of Leiden University is a scientific institute that undertakes social-science research on Africa and aims to promote a better understanding and insight into historical, current and future social developments in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The wider aim of the project was to bring more attention for development in migration policy in the Netherlands as the knowledge and commitment of the Kenyan diaspora is utilized both in Kenya and the Netherlands. Twelve volunteers, selected from systematic interviews of interested applicants from the Kenyan diaspora community (KDCN) in the Netherlands, were recruited for their professional expertise to work and share knowledge with Kenyan businesses and organizations. The twelve were individually sent

to Kenya where they spent three or six months with host organizations, contributing to a myriad of developmental activities related to their professional expertise, skill, and experience. The volunteers’ human capital was matched with positions available on the ground in Kenya by VSO Jitolee (Kenya). During posting, the ASC and KDCN continuously monitored the project’s progress in close cooperation with VSO’s Baukje Kleinbekman and Heidi Koggel.

Sylvia Cheruiyot was in Kenya from 15 October 2014 to 31 January 2015, with Noomayianat Community Development Organization (NCDO), a community based organization (www.noomayianat.org). She worked with community members in Loitokitok to promote sustainable development through resource mobilization, training and knowledge dissemination, targeted at semi-nomadic pastoralists from the Maasai community. During this three-month period, Sylvia, together with local colleagues submitted three grant proposals to donor organizations: the African Water Facility, the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, and a proposal on Community Based Decentralized Waste Management to the Government of Monaco. We are optimistic that the NCDO will receive the grants in order to achieve their objectives. In addition, the Kimana community has long faced a problem with garbage disposal. During women’s Village Savings and Loans Associations meetings, Sylvia delivered health education especially on water purification techniques, child nutrition, and she educated children on the importance of environmental sanitation.

Julius Pundo spent three months in Kenya in the first quarter of 2015 (12 January – 12 April) at the Il Ngwesi Eco-Lodge (www.ilngwesi.com), owned and managed by the Maasai of the Il Ngwesi community. This eco-lodge belongs to the Il Ngwesi Group Ranch in Laikipia County, bordering Isiolo County. Julius was assigned as a Diaspora Marketing Expert for the lodge and he contrib-

¹ ref: Call for proposal nr DCM/MA-154/2012.

uted to plans for, among other things: increasing bed occupancy rates, improving the website functions (online booking and payment merchant), resolving technical problems with the lodge's computer system, reviewing the marketing plan, and connecting the lodge to both local and international markets. "My connecting Il Ngwesi to new international partners like CBI and PUM-Nederland resulted into a US\$3000 from the latter, which was used to advertise the lodge, obtain new communication radios, computers and a powerful water pump."



Sylvia distributing gloves for ACTION

Diversification of marketing for the eco-lodge posed a big challenge against a backdrop of weakened tourism in Kenya, brought on by the Ebola scare, insecurity, and the high cost of living and inflation in Europe. Consequently, there has been a shift towards focusing on domestic tourism. Julius re-directed the lodge's marketing strategy to the domestic market, which proved successful, with potential benefits for the 9,000 people whose community communal development depends on the success of the lodge.

Florence Kadogo Nyawade, also spent exactly three months (1 March – 1 June 2015) in Kenya, as a volunteer at Women Challenged to Challenge, Nairobi, where she deployed her experience as a nurse, and worked to improve lives of women with disabilities. Armed with knowledge and experience from the care sector in the Netherlands, Kadogo organized healthcare workshops at the grassroots level in Nairobi's Kibera and Mukuru slums. Results from these workshops have now been shared with the Ministry of Health (MoH), Kenya Medical Training College (KMTTC), the University of Nairobi, and nurses trained to use sign language.

Kadogo's work underscored an urgent need to differentiate the causes of disability – road acci-

dents, medical faults, communicable and non-communicable diseases, domestic violence, alcohol and drug abuse. This differentiation will help to effectively mobilize human and capital resources to address the challenges of disability at the national and local level.



Kadogo (first on the left) at the NCWPD visit

Pamela Matinde Ten Wolde volunteered as a Policy Development and Strategy Advisor, in May until August 2015, at the Kenya Diaspora Alliance (KDA, <http://kenyadiasporaalliance.org/>) in Nairobi. Her main role in the organization was to support KDA by contributing to policy development, strategy development, organizational structure development, and systems development. Pamela asserts that her stint at KDA has helped the organization to create a more positive impact on issues and concerns raised by returnee members of foreign diaspora, and there are indications that local attitudes towards the diaspora returnees are evolving positively.

Elizabeth Atieno Bos-Muchembre was in Kenya from 26 October 2015 to 26 January 2016, also at the Kenyan Diaspora Alliance (KDA) and Discovered.us. The latter is a web shop company (<https://www.discovered.us/>) that sells hand-made products from developing countries, using Fair Trade guidelines. While at the KDA, Elizabeth was a member of the organizing committee of the KDA convention, and raised funds for the organization's proper functioning. While at Discovered.us, she acted as Local Activation Manager. "I targeted about 500 beneficiaries, and today many of the artisans are commercially active via the website [...] Back in the Netherlands, I am still in touch with the artisans via the internet and I continue fundraising activities for the KDA."

Njeru W. Mbogo's tenure as volunteer took place in Meru at the Polytechnic of Kithoka. Here, he provided assistance to the school on agricul-

tural development. On arrival, he discovered that there was little awareness in the surrounding community about school activities (thus no mutual interests), and wild elephants cross the school compound at will, damaging food crops. Focusing attention on agriculture, Njeru urgently repaired the greenhouse, repaired and protected the drip irrigation that had been damaged by elephants, and established a food cropping scheme for the students, thereby improving their agricultural skills and providing fresh food. The challenge of limited funding from the County Government led to Njeru initiating contact between the school and VSO for how VSO can help with capacity building and improve the network for acquiring additional teaching tools.



Abdi Tunu Garse, spent exactly three months (7 April 2015 – 7 July 2015) with the Enyuata Olosho Women's Group, a community based organization that acts as an umbrella for about 70 different women's groups in Northern Laikipia, Kenya. Among Abdi's responsibilities as Business Development Advisor, he provided direct technical assistance to small business owners in the research and development of business plans and marketing plans, and participated in the development, promotion, coordination, and delivery of small business management training programmes and workshops.

Matasyo Kagwa Andrew, was at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) for an extended period from 20 July 2014 till 31 December

2014. He worked extensively with YMCA shauri moyo, YMCA Kibera, YMCA South County, and YMCA Central, all in Nairobi. Andrew helped with the planning and programming of youth theatre weekends and camping. At the main office, he designed and implemented the Nairobi Family Fun Day, as well as the Nairobi public speaking contest. He also expanded the partners network by bringing on board KNT (Kenya National Theatre & Kenya Cultural Centre), KBC (Kenya broadcasting cooperation-Youth Radio), KDA (Kenya Diaspora Alliance), and TA (Transition Authority) Milele Limited.



"I provided theatre training sessions for youths every Wednesday at lunchtime; three of the youth members were employed by YMCA as gardeners. They entertain on the sides."

Toni La Tegola, spent his time in two organizations in Kenya. His first posting was as Performing Arts Advisor to Kiranga Youth Polytechnic, Muranga County, from November 2014 to February 2015. His brief included setting up a talent development programme to support development of talent in improvisation/role-play situations and productions, to assist the administration of the Youth Polytechnic with regard to the identification and preparation of talents, and to prepare trainees for plays and performances and supervise students in all club activities. Though he was expected to hit the ground running, Toni struggled to find desk space. He improvised by holding several workshops during school lunchtimes and after classes. The challenges notwithstanding, Toni is proud to have successfully created a platform where local artistes with the requisite expe-

riences visit the polytechnic and give workshops to the students who have formed a drama club.

Toni was also with the KDA (February to April 2015) as a Business Development Advisor. In this period, he facilitated KDA's presence at the Kenya Diaspora Easter Investment conference. "The presence of KDA at the Windsor conference conferred much needed visibility, particularly when I engaged the President of the Republic for a long period at our booth. The following day, the Deputy President also paid us a visit."

Dennis Snijders spent his time as a volunteer in Kenya as IT Adviser at Kiranga Youth Polytechnic. He was posted for five months from July to November 2015. "Going to Kenya on this programme was not on the same level of a Kenyan diaspora going to Kenya on vacation. My Kenya trip was different this time; I went to work in communities, lived as a villager would, and, like them, had to survive in the absence of basic amenities like running water or stable electricity. I even had my shower in the open because there was no private bathroom facility."



Dennis Snijder in Kenya

Monica Onyango worked with NASIO Trust-MUMIAS, in Kakamega County from August 24 to November 24, 2015. She supported NASIO Trust in developing policy documents on Child Protection, Human Resource and Development Policy guide, Financial Policy guide and the Health Clinic Operational Plan.

Caroline Otieno (August 3-27, 2015) contributed to development of advocacy messages in relation to gender violence and discrimination against women with disabilities at Women Challenged to Challenge.

The experiences of volunteers in Kenya has prompted important reflection on the more challenging question of how this institutionally organized programme would be of benefit to the Netherlands. Suggestions range from: engaging in more practical discourse on policy options for trade between Kenya and the Netherlands, measures for increasing added value for Kenya's agricultural products, espousing improved narratives on Kenya's socio-economic development, establishment of a Kenya Diaspora Skill Centre, and provision of invaluable experiences to newly graduated medical students who are interested in deploying their skills in rural parts of Kenya.

This project has been an excellent opportunity for both the Kenyan community in the Netherlands and Kenyan professionals to maximize the value of their social and human capital by strengthening the capacities of small- and medium enterprises in Kenya. It has also opened up a new angle regarding sources of data on the social remittances and human capital of Kenyan migrants, a research area that, to date, has received little attention. The implementation of this project also helped VSO to fulfil its goal to contribute to poverty alleviation in developing countries through knowledge sharing, skill transfer and networking.

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